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ABSTRACT

This report examines trends, research, ideas, and practices in economics education today. The report begins with a discussion of where economics instruction stands today and where it seems to be going. Implications of current happenings are examined. Only eight percent of high school graduates today take an economics course. However, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that economics was the only one of four knowledge areas in which 13-year-olds showed a significant improvement in recent years. Recent trends include a new interest in and focus on economic literacy, new offerings in economics education in schools throughout the country, and a growing level of involvement by the private sector in economics education within public schools. What research says about economics instruction is discussed. Major research findings include the following: economics can be taught to all kinds of students; attitudes of students toward economics is related to their teachers' attitudes toward economics; and there is no one, unchallengeable way to effectively teach economics. The report provides an annotated listing of resource organizations in economics education. Innovative and exemplary programs in economics education are also described. (Author/RM)

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The Renaissance in Economics Education

"Two Big Banks Hike Prime to 20.5%"
" 'Rich Man's Bill' Label Imperils Tax-Cut Plan"
"GNP Falters"

Familiar headlines? They are to many readers who recognize that Americans today face complex and serious economic problems--as serious as any in the last 50 years. Prospects for the future suggest we are in for a long battle with our economic ills.

Are our students being prepared to understand and deal with our economic complexities as future citizens and leaders? Are they being prepared to make competent personal economic decisions? What is the economic quotient (EQ) of today's secondary students?

Where Economics Instruction Stands Today

High schools that offer their students economics as an elective in the eleventh or twelfth grade and some economics in their required U.S. history and American government courses have curricula in the mainstream of economics education. Middle level schools offering a special course (yearlong, semester, or even minicourse) in economics have a curriculum that is an exception. If your middle level curriculum includes some economics instruction in history and geography classes, or in a career preparation or consumer course, you are in the mainstream.

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The pattern of offering economics as a separate, elective course at upper grade levels has been common for 50 or more years. Most large high schools offer an economics course annually; smaller schools may rotate economics with other social science subjects like psychology and sociology. Economics is most commonly taught in the social studies department, but some instruction, particularly consumer economics, may be found in other departments, particularly business, home economics, and math.

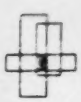
Despite its long standing in the high school curriculum, economics has not been a popular course among students--only eight percent of high school graduates

today take an economics course. Often considered a tough course suitable only for academically gifted students, only one-fourth of college-bound students take an economics course.

The idea of integrating economic concepts into required courses, particularly history and American government, became popular during the "new social studies" initiatives of the 1960s that emphasized interdisciplinary understandings. The effect of these efforts can be seen in today's history and government textbooks, which devote considerably more space and attention to economic principles and influences than did texts prior to 1960.

A new flurry of economic activity hit the curriculum scene in the 1970s when consumer and career education courses were heavily supported by federal agencies. In some schools one or both courses became part of the social studies curriculum, and at least some attention was given to institutional economics. Sometimes when the courses were placed in business, home economics, math, or guidance departments, the economics taught was primarily personal economics--how to be a wise consumer, how wages are determined, and so on. A heated controversy then arose among curriculum developers as to how--or whether--economics should be presented in an academic or in an applied manner.

Although this quick historical look makes it seem as if economic education efforts have been unsystematic, uncomprehensive, and sometimes divisive, the news is not all bleak. The National Assessment of Education Progress reports that "economics" was the only one of four knowledge areas in which 13-year-olds showed a significant improvement in recent years. This finding encourages a closer look at what is happening in economics today and at future trends.



Where Economics Seems To Be Going

The most significant changes in economics education are probably occurring without fanfare or national recognition in local schools across the nation. However, most are widespread enough to be viewed as national happenings. Three merit particular attention.

Throughout the nation, there is a new interest in and focus on economic literacy. This attention is coming from two sources. One is the attention from the private sector resulting from business and labor's concern that the public schools are not providing students sufficient understanding of the economic marketplace and the consumer/worker roles in it. The impact of the private sector's concern is felt both locally, as local companies or individuals get involved in their community's schools, and nationally, as large corporations develop programs and materials for general educational use. In addition, textbook publishing companies are offering many more materials for economics now than in the past.

The new public interest in economics education has influenced educational institutions to look anew at their economics offerings. The most profound impact is found among the new mandates on the books in 23 states that require some form of economics or free enterprise education be taught in public secondary

schools. These mandates, plus local school concern about economic education, have led to numerous districts specifying economic literacy as a critical social studies and sometimes a critical general learning goal--a basic along with the three Rs.

New offerings in economics education are springing up in schools throughout the country. After years of being cast as an advanced student's elective, economics (in a variety of forms) is now being offered and sometimes required of all students. In some instances, economics instruction continues to be offered in the form of a traditional course in institutional economics. But in many other situations, economics is taught from a personal, applied perspective and is more likely to occur in business, math, or home economics courses.

Perhaps the most prominent change in economics offerings is at the junior high/middle school level. New courses are being developed for students, particularly ninth graders, which focus entirely or partially on economics. Often these courses stress the economic aspects of working and consuming. They are proving popular because such courses appeal to the developmental needs and interests of ninth graders who are often employed in their first jobs and have more spending power than at previous ages. The movement toward economics offerings in the middle level school is being strengthened by new economics and consumer education textbooks and supplementary materials available from major publishers.

There is a growing level of involvement by the private sector in economics education within the public schools. Not only has the private sector expressed a concern about the economic literacy of emerging workers and consumers, they have literally "put their money where their mouth is." In some areas, business or business-related organizations have given funds to school districts to implement economics programs or buy materials for programs. Corporations are funding "chairs" in economics departments in universities for the study of economics, particularly free enterprise economics. Articles on the economics quotient of our nation's students and adults have been frequent in business and popular publications. Most importantly, quite a large number of companies have produced or funded the development of curriculum materials to be used in classrooms for economics instruction. A recent directory of such materials lists 299 materials and services from 113 corporations. Nowhere else in the curriculum is there such a direct and extensive effort by the private sector to influence instruction.

Implications of the Current Happenings

While news of national happenings is interesting to local educators, the implications of those trends for curriculum programing and staffing at the local level are more important. Several implications of the trends mentioned above are suggested.

The Foundation for Teaching Economics is a public, nonprofit foundation whose purpose is to significantly improve the economic literacy of junior high school students across the country. Among other projects, the FTE has sponsored:

- The writing, testing, and dissemination of the textbook Our Economy: How It Works and its companion Teacher's Guide;

- The writing of Teaching About Our Economy, a college-level textbook for teacher candidates and practicing teachers on how to teach economics; and

- The writing of the junior high school volume of The Master Curriculum Guide in Economics, which teachers and administrators use to plan strategies for teaching economics.

In these projects and others, the FTE has worked closely with the Joint Council on Economic Education and, to a lesser extent, with other economic education organizations. For further information on the FTE, contact Charles A. Foster, Jr., President, at 555 California St., Suite 4600, San Francisco, Calif. 94104, phone (415) 421-6615.

State mandates in economics education have the potential to encourage economics instruction in the local school setting, but they may also limit such instruction. A recent study by the Foundation for Teaching Economics of state mandates in economics arrived at two generalizations: in states with a push for economics mandates, the legislature and the business community are working together to provide impetus for the programs. States without mandates tend to have strong local autonomy with the school districts prescribing most graduation requirements.

Three forms of mandates emerged in the study. One was a mandate enforced in eight states to teach "economic education," with four of those states requiring a specific economics course for graduation. Seven states mandate consumer education, with only Tennessee requiring a combined "consumer/economics/free enterprise system" course for graduation. In 12 states, free enterprise mandates appear--with three states requiring a separate or combined free enterprise course for graduation.

While not having specific economics mandates, 16 other states encourage the infusion of economics, consumer, and free enterprise education into the total K-12 social studies program.

The impact of such mandates on local schools varies with the form of the mandate. The more general mandates have been useful in providing schools formerly without economics programs the impetus to include economics in their curricula. Unfortunately, the money necessary to provide new courses generally does not accompany these mandates, and too often other social studies or business offerings must be cut to make room for economics.

In states having more specific mandates, particularly mandates that specify "free enterprise," educators are struggling with the questions of how to design courses that teach the principles of the free enterprise economic system without unrealistically extolling its virtues or ignoring the importance of having students compare various kinds of economic systems. Ultimately, the local school must decide how to implement the mandate while pursuing its other educational goals.

Private sector involvement in economics education can be valuable, but must be carefully reviewed. Schools are generally unaccustomed to receiving private funds for curriculum purposes. In these days of reduced school budgets and rising costs, the attraction of additional funds is strong, and there are numerous examples of constructive, educationally sound working relationships between local industries and businesses and schools. However, there are also examples of heavy-handedness on the part of businesses in making demands for certain information or perspectives to be taught (or not taught). More than one teacher has gratefully accepted the offer of a prepaid field trip or guest lecturer from a local business only to find his or her students listening to a very biased presentation of particular issues--sometimes unrelated to the agreed-upon topic. Similarly, some of the curriculum materials produced by the private sector are accurate in content and attractively presented; others are biased or inappropriate in terms of reading levels and interest levels.

A carefully negotiated and planned arrangement between a segment of the local private sector and the schools can be a welcome financial and human resource boost for economics education efforts. But such assistance must be carefully monitored by school personnel to avoid conflict with overall educational goals.

Although there is considerable attention being given to economic literacy now, no generally accepted definition of economic literacy exists. Most educators readily agree that students should know more about economics, but what should they know? Is economic literacy being able to read and understand the principles discussed in an economics textbook? Is it being able to read and understand the economic terms used in newspapers and on television news reports? Is economic literacy knowing how to prepare a personal budget and live by it? Or is economic literacy an unfailing loyalty to the concept of free enterprise?

Lacking nationally agreed-upon economic literacy standards, local educators must assume the responsibility for deciding within their schools what direction their economics instruction will take. Will economics be considered a social science course in which student objectives focus on understanding the principles and institutions of our economic system and those of other nations? Or, will students be considered economically literate if they can recognize consumer fraud and understand social security deductions on their salary checks?

Fortunately, there are some guidelines to help school personnel decide how to define economic literacy as well as some instruments to help measure growth in literacy. In particular the tests of economic literacy developed for specific grade levels by the Joint Council on Economics Education (address given later) can be of aid in local efforts. But the final decision must be made by local educators, with input from parents, other citizens (including business and industry representatives), and students.

What Research Says About Economics Instruction

In the past 10 years a considerable amount of research has been conducted on economics education. While this research provides no absolutes for curriculum

development or instructional procedures, compiled results of numerous studies do suggest some directions or guidelines.

First, economics can be taught to all kinds of students. There is a common folklore that women do not do as well in economics as men, but research has not born this out. Similarly, although there is some conflicting evidence, it appears that socioeconomic status is not related to student achievement in economics--lower socioeconomic status students can learn economics as well as their more affluent peers. Not surprisingly, however, there is some indication that economic understanding is related to scholastic achievement--advanced students do better in economics. So while student needs and interests should be accounted for in planning economics instruction, no segment of a secondary school population need be excluded from economics education.

Attitudes of students toward economics is related to their teachers' attitudes toward economics. How the teacher feels about certain economic issues is clearly related to the attitudes expressed by his or her students. This is a particularly important finding when it is linked with data showing that fewer than half the teachers currently teaching economics at the secondary level have ever had a course in economics. There is great hesitancy among social studies teachers to teach economics. They consider it difficult, beyond their capabilities. Yet, as staffs are reduced and economics requirements are increased, many additional untrained teachers will be teaching economics classes.

This situation requires thoughtful consideration by administrators. If teachers fear or dislike teaching economics, and students reflect the attitudes of their teachers, it is imperative that the school system try to intervene in improving the level of teacher competence and in improving teacher attitudes toward economics. Such improvement might result from giving economics recruits specialized inservice, requiring additional college courses, or providing released time for special preparation. Whatever the strategy, improving the self-confidence and competence of the all-too-typical untrained and fearful secondary economics teacher is critical in student achievement and attitude toward economics.

Finally, perhaps the most important news from the research findings on economics education is that there is no one, unchallengeable way to effectively teach economics. In reviewing findings of experiments with several kinds of instructional techniques (e.g., simulation or gaming, systems design, integration of economic concepts into history courses), no one approach emerges as clearly superior to others. However, it is clear that direct instruction in economics, with any of these or other methods, is better than no instruction. So, for schools that are considering adding economics or revising current economics courses, the suggestion from research is to be more concerned that economics be taught than to worry about how it will be taught.

Three organizations that can aid local personnel in developing or revising economics programs are described below.

Resource Organizations in Economics Education

The Joint Council on Economic Education - 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036 (212) 582-5150.

The Joint Council on Economic Education (JCEE) is an organization of economists and educators dedicated to improving economic education by improving the quality and increasing the quantity of economics being taught in schools and colleges. Among JCEE's activities are the development of curriculum materials, research on new teaching strategies, publication of testing materials, sponsorship of national and local conferences, and consultation with local schools and teachers.

JCEE has affiliated state councils in most states throughout the country that provide similar services on a more local basis. In addition the JCEE maintains some 221 centers on college campuses to assist in local economic education efforts.

Interested educators can receive information on the nearest state council or center and details on how to use its services by contacting Michael A. MacDowell at the above address.

Center for the Development of Economics Education - University of the Pacific, Colliver Hall, Room 202, Stockton, Calif. 95211 (209) 946-2463.

The Center for the Development of Economics Education, an affiliate of the Joint Council, is a relative newcomer to the field of economics education and is concentrating its efforts on economics study in grades 7, 8, and 9. Its first major effort was the development of a secondary (primarily junior high) textbook, Our Economy: How It Works, which teaches the principles of economics through case studies. Additional efforts have been directed toward developing teaching strategies for junior high economics instruction and designing materials to be used in preparing teachers to teach economics at precollege levels. For information about the Center's products or services, contact Ronald A. Banaszak at the above address.

Social Science Education Consortium, Inc. - 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colo. 80302 (303) 492-8154.

Focusing on the entire field of social studies education, the Social Science Education Consortium, Inc. has had a long-standing interest in the place of economics in elementary and secondary curricula. Through teacher resource publications and consultation services, the SSEC works with school districts and teachers across the nation to more fully and effectively integrate economics into the overall social studies program. SSEC also serves schools and teachers in the selection of economics and consumer education textbooks and supplementary materials suitable for local school needs and conditions. For additional information, contact James Davis at the above address.

Exempli Gratia

Innovative and Exemplary Programs in Economics Education

The "cutting edge" of economics education is now, and always has been, at the local school level. Across the nation, many successful programs are improving student learning and knowledge of their economic world. Here are just a few such programs.

Project LINKS, Elkhart Community Schools, Elkhart, Ind.
Contact: Joseph A. Rueff, Director, Project LINKS

Although the Elkhart Community Schools have traditionally included economics, career education, and consumer education as part of the instruction in their junior and senior high curricula, a grant from the U.S. Office of Education and the Indiana Department of Public Instruction has added a new dimension to economics and other social science instruction.

Project LINKS has resulted in the development of a set of resource materials for teachers on the geography, history, economics, culture, and politics of Elkhart. Packaged as loose-leaf, reproducible sheets and slide/tape sets, the materials in the economics section present facts on topics such as Elkhart's economic growth, the major industries and businesses in the area, land use and agricultural impact, the status of labor, and case studies of three unusual local firms.

Project LINKS was born from the conviction that one of the basic problems in the social science curriculum in Elkhart was helping students relate to the concepts and processes of inquiry that are at the heart of social science education. Elkhart teachers felt texts and other published materials often treat social events and movements superficially and, from the student's viewpoint, at a distance.

Project LINKS attempts to shorten that distance by viewing the community as a social laboratory in which students can develop better perceptions of their roles in society by viewing their locality and understanding its relation to the rest of the nation and the world. By having locally developed materials on the Elkhart area at hand, teachers have been not only encouraged, but enabled to bring economics "home" to their students.

Comparative Economics Systems, Woodbury Junior High School, Shaker Heights, Ohio
Contact: Salvatore Fabrizio

When students enroll in Fabrizio's ninth-grade "Comparative Economic Systems" course, they soon learn the teacher's major goal for them is to become independent thinkers and responsible citizens. In the course of their study students are asked to look at various issues through the eyes of noted economists. One week it may be Milton Friedman looking at the social responsibilities of the American business executive; the next week John Kenneth Galbraith assessing the new industrial state. By having students look at the world through the perspective of various "thinkers," Fabrizio believes students sharpen their own abilities to hypothesize, analyze data, and draw conclusions.

In addition to the "important thinker" strategy, students are required to complete special projects that, in the past, have included preparing a plan for the economic growth of an imaginary underdeveloped nation (Fabrizio Island), and a semester project--required of all students--to explore and work on a limited basis at a career opportunity of the student's choice. These work experiences are written up by students and used as part of the student's final grade. At the end of the course, students are required to complete a self-evaluation that focuses on their perception of their own growth in inquiry skills, attitudes, values, knowledge, and essay writing.

DEEP--Developmental Economic Education Program, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, N.C.
Contact: Harriet Parrish, Social Studies Coordinator

Concern about lack of economics instruction and about teachers insufficiently prepared to teach economics arose in the early 1970s in Winston-Salem, N.C. To meet this concern, the county school system entered into an agreement with the Joint Council on Economic Education in 1974 to become a DEEP affiliate. The DEEP concept, which operates in school systems throughout the country, encourages economics instruction without imposing restrictions on local schools by making available a wide variety of teaching materials at all grade levels and providing on-the-scene aid via the state economic education councils. Since its inception in 1974, the DEEP project has worked vigorously with the local Chamber of Commerce and through the Chamber with many local businesses in providing resources and services previously unavailable to local educators.

The initial DEEP activity, and a continuing feature of the program, was an economics education workshop for teachers during which teachers were exposed to a variety of economic topics through presentations by college professors and local business persons. But the DEEP program has not stopped with one-shot inservice days. Now the program includes five dimensions: field trips, resource materials, speakers bureau, teacher education, and curriculum.

Each aspect is overseen by a committee composed of educators and citizen members. All the committees have functioned actively and constructively, but the committee on resource materials has performed a particularly useful function in soliciting and screening materials for classroom economics instruction from local businesses. Through screening they have been able to forewarn teachers of materials that are offered as educational but are really sales or promotional literature.

The goal of the DEEP program remains the same as at the time of its origin--to improve student's economic understanding by better preparing teachers to teach economics. But years of experience have taught Winston-Salem educators that a long-term commitment--with continual attention to upgrading curriculum goals and objectives and continual monitoring and revising of community support services--is the key to improved instruction.

Simulation and Reality: An Economic Experience
Simulation and Reality: A Consumer Experience, Manual High School, Denver, Colo.
Contact: Richard Jordan and Jarrell McCracken

While others talk about simulations and community-based experiences, Richard Jordan and Jarrell McCracken have developed two high school courses that combine the two teaching strategies into an academic/applied economics course. The semester course in economics, which is open to juniors and seniors as an elective, has as its goal the understanding of basic economic principles such as scarcity and allocation, money and monetary policy, banking, and markets.

But there the similarity with other economics courses stops and creative teaching begins. Most in-class instruction revolves around 11 simulations that are designed to actively involve students in the concepts being studied. Simulations are followed by field trips to local businesses and industries that exemplify the principles being studied. On each field trip, a representative of the company engages in a question-answer session with students, a session for which they are well prepared before the field trip.

How have these teachers been able to continue this extensive field trip program in the face of budget cutbacks and transportation difficulties? According to Jordan it's because, "We don't take 'no' for an answer when we request out-of-school experiences." They have also been aided by the Adopt-a-School program in the Denver Public School system, which provides a liaison person between the community and the school.

Another problem these teachers seemed to have overcome is how to get company representatives who will be honest with the students and who will not avoid their questions. Jordan's experience in this respect is to "go to the top person in the company, not an underling." These people don't have to worry about giving away company secrets and are more willing to be direct and open with students.

Based on the success of the economics experience, the teacher team has developed a second course on consumer economics. Again, simulations and field trip experiences are an integral part of the students' learning experience.

Required Economics, Homewood-Flossmoor High School, Flossmoor, Ill.
Contact: John Morton

Every student at Homewood-Flossmoor must take a year-long course in economics. In the 1980-81 school year, the program included about 700 students. Three kinds of courses, geared to varying student abilities, are offered, with students having a choice of regular, essentials, or honors economics. The regular course is built around the 24 concepts in the Joint Council of Economic Education's Master Curriculum Guide, and has a strong nine-week unit on consumer education. The essentials course focuses even more heavily than the regular course on consumer economics, while the honors course has a greater emphasis on economic theory.

There are at least three community-based projects per year in each course. In the American business project each student selects a company listed on the stock exchange, sends for its financial reports, and analyzes its financial condition. To culminate consumer studies, students must choose an occupation, obtain an income, and live within that income for a year--in simulation. During the public finance study every student must attend a meeting of a local unit of government, such as a school board or village board and analyze what happened at the meeting.

Although some people contend that students never like required courses this axiom seems untrue at Homewood-Flossmoor. On the Test of Economic Literacy (Joint Council on Economic Education) Homewood-Flossmoor students have more than doubled the national gain between pre and post-testing on Form A, and tripled the gain on Form B. In addition there are many letters on file from former students praising the program; an unusually large number of students receive advanced credit for college economics; and among a group of alumni, 66 percent said that economics was "the most important" course they had taken in high school.

e
g United States Economic System, Pasadena School District, Pasadena, Calif.
Contact: Ron Raybin, Director of Curriculum

San Diego School District, San Diego, Calif.
Contact: Harvey Prokop, Social Studies Specialist

Pasadena

In August 1978, the board of education of the Pasadena schools voted to offer a high school course on the United States economic system. At about the same time a local foundation, the American Freedom Foundation, donated $2,500 to help buy materials for an economics course. Ron Raybin, director of curriculum, decided to also try to involve the business community in this project. He met with the chairperson of the Chamber of Commerce Education Committee to discuss the need for course support. The Education Committee expressed interest and pledged financial support. Through a joint effort of the Chamber committee chairperson and Raybin, a number of potential texts for teaching tenth grade students were assembled. A committee of high school teachers was formed to review the texts.

In time the teacher committee decided to pilot test the text Our Economy: How It Works developed by the Center for the Development of Economics Education at the University of the Pacific and published by Addison-Wesley. Raybin attended the meeting of the Chamber's education committee to share copies of the proposed text and the teacher's course idea. The Chamber approved the course idea and sent letters to members requesting donations to help defray district textbook costs. More than $8,000 was collected through the Chamber and the Freedom Foundation.

Through this joint effort the school district and the business community have developed a more positive working relationship. The district was able to secure appropriate materials for a new course without feeling unduly pressured by demands from the private sector for certain information or attitudes to be taught or omitted from the tenth-grade course.

San Diego

In order to help satisfy student interest in economics and the free enterprise system, the San Diego schools last spring requested assistance in funding the purchase of copies of Our Economy: How It Works. The Wells Fargo Foundation responded with a generous donation of 760 copies of the textbook, valued at about $7,600.

Acknowledging the contribution, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction and Foundation for Teaching Economics (FTE) trustee Wilson Riles said he hopes that other businesses will consider donating specified learning materials to schools. FTE President Charles A. Foster, Jr. announced that the FTE would provide a $2,000 grant for the inservice training of teachers who use the textbook.

According to social studies specialist Harvey Prokop, the donated textbooks will be used by about 1,520 students this year in 24 sections of the ninth and tenth grade elective course, You and Your Money. The books will augment five classroom sets donated by San Diego Federal Savings and Loan in 1980. In all, nearly 2,000 San Diego students will study Our Economy during this school year. With the expanded use of this textbook, the economic education program at the secondary level will complement the fine economic education program already functioning at the elementary level.

The FTE hopes to facilitate contacts between other schools who would like to purchase Our Economy but lack funds and businesses who want to help.

This Curriculum Report was developed and written by Sharryl Hawke, staff associate at the Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., located in the Educational Resources Center, 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colo. 80302. The editors appreciate the cooperation and help of Charles A. Foster, Jr., president of Foundation for Teaching Economics, Suite 4600, 555 California St., San Francisco, Calif. 94104.

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